



Amicale
Internationale
KZ Neuengamme

Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme, Jean-Dolidier-Weg 75, 21039 Hamburg

Transcripts of the digital speeches commemorating the 76th anniversary of the bombing of the ships with concentration camp prisoners in the Bay of Lubeck

Speech by Jean-Michel Gaussoit, vice-Präsident of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme and secretary General of the Amicale de Neuengamme et de ses Kommandos

Speech by Marian Hawling, survivor of the bombing of the Cap Arcona

Speech by Bernard Jeune, son of the French resistance fighter Eugène Jeune, who was killed during the bombing

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Bürgerstiftung
Schleswig-Holsteinische
Gedenkstätten

Jean-Michel Gaussoit

Dear representatives of Schleswig-Holstein and Neustadt,

Dear Mr. Hawling, your words have moved us deeply,

My dear fellow countryman Bernard Jeune,

Dear friends,

The names of some places in particular remind us of the atrocities concentration camp prisoners suffered at the hands of the Nazis in the last weeks or days of World War II. When it comes to Neuengamme, these names are Sandbostel, Bergen-Belsen, Wöbbelin (where my father succumbed to exhaustion and hunger) and Lübeck Bay. Among these sites of death, Lübeck Bay with the extent of the tragedy that took place there on May 3, 1945 is the one which symbolizes in the most striking manner the death intended for the prisoners in the last days of the war which should have brought them freedom.

These tragic events are still remembered, they are part of our collective memory and the memory of them must never fade. For the past few years, we have witnessed a resurgence of dogmatism, intolerance, racism and antisemitism, a widening gap between ethnic and religious groups, a dangerous rise in the number of communities that reject one another. We can see the tendency toward hate and the urge to dehumanize members of other communities based on the criteria which, sadly, is reminiscent of the pillars of National Socialism.

In light of these alarming developments, it is imperative, today more than ever, to bear in mind the murderous frenzy that was unleashed in Europe in 1933. With the past in mind, the AIN, on whose behalf I am speaking today, wants to join you all in remembering almost 7000 people whose lives tragically ended in the waves and on the shores of the Baltic Sea 76 years ago.

Marian Hawling

My name is Marian Hawling. I was born in Poland, in a small town named Lwów, which is today part of Ukraine. I am 96 years old and I am a survivor of the Cap Arcona. I was amongst the last group of prisoners leaving the Neungamme camp. After days of gruesome marching, we reached Neustadt and were immediately taken to the Cap Arcona.

Then there was a bit of confusion. They did not know where to place us. They told us to walk down the widest staircase into a large room that reminded me of a ball or dining room. And that is where we stayed for another hour or so and then the ship was bombed. We tried to get on deck, but the soldiers standing there pointed their rifles at us and told us they would shoot.

But sometime after the smoke got so thick panic erupted and stampedes started up the staircase. Some shots were fired. Some people fell. Some soldiers were trampled. I was on deck looking for something to float on. Staying on the ship was a death sentence. I took my clothes off, conquered my fear made a big jump into the water. I was lucky. I saw a raft with four men on it already paddling away. I managed to swim to them. A little struggle started, but it didn't last long. I was persistent and stayed on.

We reached the shore at about just before sunset. I was almost unconscious. I lost consciousness several times. My last memory is that I was on a truck in front of a military building, barracks, in Neustadt and that is where I was put in by some men. I stayed there all night. In the morning I poked my head out the front door and there I saw a British soldier standing near the ramp. In that moment I knew I had survived the war.

It is very important to have those commemorations taking place to keep those things alive so that we might learn something from history so that those terrible things won't ever happen again.

Bernard Jeune

Thank you for inviting me to give a short speech about my late father. My French father, Eugene Jeune, and my Danish stepfather, Gregers Jensen, were both active in the resistance in their respective countries, they were both imprisoned in Neuengamme where they both worked as doctors – my father as a young 26-year-old doctor, my stepfather as an older doctor at the age of 50.

At the beginning of the war, my father spent a short time as POW in German captivity. Upon his return home, he went back to medical school and graduated in 1942. While still in college, he joined the resistance group Comité Interfaculté de Résistance. As a young doctor, he joined the Service Périclès network, which was responsible for initiating the Maquis schools for the members of the resistance and was a part of the Combat movement. It assisted the headquarters in Lyon in terms of organization and management.

As a young doctor working at the old hospital Hôtel Dieu in the heart of Lyon, he was in charge of the connections and the exchange between Lyon and the Maquis schools in the Alps and the Jura mountains and organized training courses and transports which made the work at the hospital possible. In this way he was able to help Jews go into hiding in many different places as well. In one of the hospital courtyards, commemorative plaques have been put up for the doctors who worked at the hospital and who were killed during both world wars or died in concentration camps. My father's name can be found there too.

My father was arrested at his home on April 20, 1944 by Klaus Barbie, the head of the Gestapo in Lyon, known as the Butcher of Lyon. He was initially imprisoned in the Montluc prison, just like many other French resistance fighters, and tortured by Klaus Barbie and his henchmen. My mother did not know if he had been tortured but other members of the Périclès network were, including Ms. Lesèvre, who survived Ravensbrück and testified against Klaus Barbie in Lyon in 1986. A few weeks before Lyon was liberated, my father was transferred to Compiègne and then on to Neuengamme on July 28. He spent the winter 1944-1945 in Neuengamme, working as a prisoner doctor in one of the camp's sick bays (sick bay II). He worked with other prisoner doctors including a Danish doctor, Gregers Jensen, who spoke French fluently. Despite the age difference, they became friends.

The Danish doctor had been active in the Danish resistance on the Als island in the south of Denmark. He was arrested by the Gestapo on October 6, 1944 following an act of sabotage targeting a radar on Als. He was first held in a camp close to the border (Frøslevlejren) and then transferred to Neuengamme on November 29. In April 1945, he returned home on the White Buses in the course of the Bernadotte rescue action, like all the other Danish and Norwegian prisoners. After the final transport carrying Danes and Norwegians left Neuengamme on April 20, 10,000 prisoners from other countries were transported out of Neuengamme. Most of them were taken by

train to the Lübeck Bay and then to Neustadt, where they were loaded onto ships. My father ended up on the largest ship, the Cap Arcona, where he lost his life together with thousands of other prisoners, when the ships were bombarded and set on fire by the RAF who did not know they were carrying prisoners.

My father's hope to see his family again (my mother gave birth to my younger brother in November 1944) was recorded in a French book by a former fellow prisoner. While listening to the sound of the approaching cannons on the other side of the Elbe, my father told him: "This time it's really happening! We are going to be liberated, they are finished." Louis Martin-Chauffier, another fellow prisoner who survived Neuengamme and Bergen-Belsen, wrote several pages about my father in his book and so did the fellow prisoner François Rendu in his memoirs about Neuengamme. These are the only things I know about the time my father spent in Neuengamme. My Danish stepfather never spoke about it, but he wrote a report about his experiences as a prisoner doctor for the Museum of Danish Resistance in Copenhagen. The historian Langwithz Smith, who is also present today, used it as a source for many quotations in the book he wrote about Neuengamme in Danish.

After the war, my Danish stepfather contacted the Association of French Doctors to find out what had happened to my father. The Association confirmed that he died on the Cap Arcona. He got in touch with my uncle, my father's older brother who was a doctor in Lyon himself and who put him in contact with my mother. He traveled to France to inform her about my father. They maintained correspondence for years before he invited her to Denmark and eventually proposed to her (his wife had died of cancer early in the war.) In January 1949, we – my mother, my brother and I – moved to Augustenborg on Als in the south of Denmark, where my stepfather worked as a general practitioner.

A rather lengthy article on the somewhat happy end of this tragic story has been published in a Danish daily newspaper. The journalist learned of the story when I told it publicly for the first time during an event at the University of Southern Denmark organized by the Center for National Socialism and Holocaust. Initially, I refused to be interviewed by a journalist because I was afraid that my story would be overdramatized. This was 2015, when so many refugees came to Europe, so he tried to persuade me that my story might resonate with readers. This argument convinced me, and I agreed to the interview. He entitled the article "Hitler's Brutes Sent My Father to His Death so I Became a Dane." And that is indeed true.